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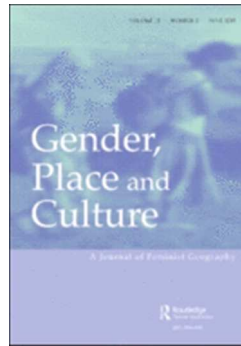
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**Marriage under occupation: Israel's spousal visa restrictions
in the West Bank**

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Marriage under occupation: Israel's spousal visa restrictions in the West Bank

Abstract: In the West Bank, hundreds of non-Palestinian women who are married to Palestinian men have recently been issued shortened visas with tightened restrictions. This means they are often prevented from working, their mobilities are severely reduced and they are placed in extremely precarious bureaucratic and procedural positions. The research in this article draws from fieldwork interviews with women affected by such restrictions to show how politically induced precarities produce gendered effects towards specific ends of the occupation of Palestine. We thus frame a discussion of the women's experiences of visa regulations through precarity before giving an account of the profound effects on women's roles in family and political life. We then broaden the focus to consider Israel's occupation of Palestine and the demographic implications of the gendered effects of visa precarity. In doing so we make the argument that Israel's spousal visa regulations contribute to the (re)production of uneven gender relations and the demographic objective of emptying out the West Bank.

Keywords: Palestine, precarity, demography, gender, marriage, visa administration

1. Introduction

In the West Bank there are hundreds of non-Palestinian women who are married to Palestinian men (Hass 2017). Since the Oslo Accords in 1993 and 1995, these women have been issued Visitor Permits that are renewed each 12 months, enabling them to reside and work in the West Bank. In the last few years, and especially since the beginning of 2017, however, an increasing number of non-Palestinian women married to Palestinians have been issued shorter visas with tighter restrictions. Official information from the Israeli COGAT¹ is particularly difficult to obtain – or purposely opaque – but there is a documented increase in the cases of women from Europe and North America (especially) who live in the West Bank and are now tied to visa stipulations that deny the right to work, to consular services and to freedom of movement (Hass 2017; Right to Enter 2017). This means, specifically, that they are no longer allowed to travel through Ben Gurion, Israel's main airport, to visit family back home; they often cannot visit Tel Aviv or Jerusalem, not even to access embassies or consulates; they are denied permission to

¹ Coordinator of Government Activity in the Territories, Israel's arm of the military that oversees civilian issues in the West Bank and Gaza

work and to drive; their everyday mobility through checkpoints is limited; and they face the continual and real threat of deportation or denied re-entry, and therefore the prospect of being separated from their spouses, children and friends. These recent developments have thus extended the precarity that is so common for Palestinians under occupation (see Harker 2012; Joronen 2016; 2017) to citizens of other states on the basis of their marital status. In this article, we discuss the visa conditions of these non-Palestinian spouses as a particular way of inducing political precarities that has troubling and profound gendered effects to do with women's roles in family and political life.

Our focus on women from Europe and North America intends to complement scholarship on the non-Palestinian spouses from neighbouring Arab states, such as the many with Jordanian citizenship, or those with Israeli citizenship or Jerusalem residency and affected by the 'Citizenship and Entry Law' (see Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2012; 2015, 47-52). The spouses in these circumstances face a different set of legal restrictions that constitute an equally pernicious strategy of intervention in Palestinian political and social life. For the women included in this research, the threat of expulsion is at the centre of the condition of precarity. To be explicit, it is not our intention to examine the cases in a way that emphasises "Western" experiences of the occupation over "Palestinian" ones, but rather to hold the two together to deepen our understanding of gender under occupation. Israel's restrictions on visas for European and North American citizens is hence seen here as yet another route to govern the occupied population and to subjugate Palestinian life in the West Bank. To expand on this, we thus consider the gendered effects of visa restrictions in the wider context of Israel's 'demographic war' on the population of the Occupied Territories (Faitelson 2009), evidenced in a long history from the ethnic cleansing of Palestinians in 1948 and prevention of the Right to Return (Pappé 2006) to the contemporary presence of 600,000 settlers in the occupied West Bank and East Jerusalem and ever-stricter residency and building regulations for Palestinians (Jefferis 2012; Joronen 2017a). As a further pre-emptive corrective, our focus solely on women reflects the fact that the vast majority of non-

Palestinian spouses in the West Bank are women. What unites all of the cases we discuss here is the difficulty to obtain visas over the past 2-3 years, with most of the cases reporting a marked further tightening of restrictions from the beginning of 2017. We return to these correctives in the concluding section of the article to indicate future lines of inquiry for research on precarity in the occupation of Palestine.

The main objective of this article is to show how politically induced precarities in the cases of non-Palestinian women married to Palestinians produce gendered effects towards specific ends of the occupation of Palestine. The article proceeds in three main sections. In the first, we frame a discussion of the women's experiences of the new visa regulations through precarity, making the argument that the restrictions place women and their families in extremely precarious bureaucratic and procedural positions. In the second section, we draw on interviews with women and their husbands to discuss the profound effects on women's roles in family and political life. A third section considers the demographic implications of visa precarity and gendered effects. In doing so we make the argument that Israel's spousal visa regulations contribute to the (re)production of uneven gender relations and the demographic objective of emptying out the West Bank. We close with reflection on the contributions of the research and explicate future lines of inquiry that are indicated by the analysis we present.

2. Slow-motion government, bureaucracy and precarity

Scholarly interest in precarity has grown especially since Judith Butler's (2006; 2009) novel elaboration that moved beyond discussions of precariousness in the context of post-war capitalism (Kearns 2013; Rose 2014; cf. Standing 2011). Butler's reading of precarity as a 'politically induced condition' (2009, 25) has been of influence especially for geographers examining contemporary modes of governance in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (e.g. Harker 2012; Joronen 2016). For instance, attention has been focused on the role of threat and precarity in the widespread ill-treatment of Palestinian youth by Israeli military personnel

(Joronen 2016); the limits to and possibilities of resistance to the occupation (e.g. Falah 2004; Griffiths 2017; Hammami 2016); and the manifold 'slow-motion' bureaucratic means by which the Israeli Civil Administration maintains Palestinians' precarity (Berda 2017; Joronen 2017). In the context of families and the occupation of Palestine, scholars have further documented how Israeli officials construct the Palestinian family as nuclear so as to make surveillance more effective (Zureik 2001, 219), and the ways that family members of each household are frequently photographed and mapped by the Israeli Army (Huss 2017). Additional work has identified the family as the locus of the more extreme forms of colonial violence, from house demolition and deportation to collective punishment, checkpoint restrictions and denial of reunification (Griffiths and Repo 2018; Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2012). Across these literatures there is a keen sense that the framework of precarity enables a thoroughgoing critique of this late period of occupation that is characterised more and more by a 'combination of slow and offsetting regulatory, legal and administrative practices, which retain (and thus produce) the precarious spaces of everyday Palestinian life' (Joronen 2017, 1000; see also Berda 2017).

In the more specific context of precarity and women's roles in the family, Christopher Harker's writing has shown convincingly how "the Palestinian family" is enmeshed in patriarchal, state and colonial forms of power and violence' (2012, 854) and is thus a site where 'heightened exposure to precarity [is] experienced – particularly by female family members' (2012, 861). There remains, however, little existing research on cases where one of the spouses is non-Palestinian. A notable exception is an Israeli government-funded study on 'Intermarriages between Western Women and Palestinian Men' that argues 'patriarchy and East-West power relations affect mainly the women, having to face marginalisation on the basis of their gender and their foreignness' (Roer-Strier and Ben Ezra 2006, 41). The researchers argue further:

The [Palestinian] environment is embedded with cultural symbolic boundaries that keep the foreign wife outside the cultural group ... the wife, as a woman and a foreigner, is not entitled to make any family decision independently from the in-laws. She has to rely on her husband,

thus giving predominance within the couple to the man ... [reproducing] gender in a patriarchal society (2006, 52).

Perspectives such as this place marginalisation solely in the hands of “Palestinian patriarchy”, an undoubtedly extant category, but one that sidesteps the deleterious role of the State of Israel in the worsened conditions of foreign spouses living in the Occupied Territories. One of the interviewees in our research, Laura, a European woman married to a Palestinian man, was keen to point this out: “this is state-funded [research] to see how they can counteract ... they’ve noticed that more foreign women have come here and are staying, and it’s obviously bothering them and it’s messing with the demographic, with the status quo” (Laura). Laura’s point is an important one and brings the imperative to situate consideration of “intermarriages” in the context of demography and status quo, and also to update analysis in the context of recent changes to COGAT policy towards foreign spouses.

For all the cases included in this research,² there was a change in policy somewhere in the early spring of 2017 when, as Anna recounted, “the period of the visa got shorter, suddenly it was two months, [whereas] before it was a year”. The same was true for Olivia in Ramallah: “they just suddenly started to give me two-month visas with no explanation, now it’s down to one month”. Sam, a prominent activist in family reunification struggled to pinpoint exactly when and why this change in policy took place:

No idea really, but I can speculate that given the Israeli decision to press forward with Trump in office. We know that the Israeli side hired 200 new staff person at the “Civil” - really *Military* - Administration that runs the occupation ... We have been told by more than one source that with this addition of staff there is a renewed approach to be more controlling, and that has meant sloppy application of general occupation principles, whatever those are.

² The research here is based on 15 in-depth interviews: 10 with women of either European or North American nationality who are married to Palestinians; 3 with Palestinian men married to non-Palestinian women; one with an activist involved in ‘Right to Enter’ (www.righttoenter.ps); and one with a Jerusalem-based lawyer who, at time of writing, is working to represent such women in Israeli courts. Three of the interviews were conducted by email exchange, four took place face-to-face in the West Bank, while the others were conducted via video call; these were digitally recorded and transcribed for analysis. All of the names we use in the discussion are pseudonyms and we name only broad geographic areas (both in the West Bank and relating to the citizenships of the interviewees) to ensure further the anonymity of the people to whom we spoke.

Sam established the Right to Enter campaign³ during the Second Intifada when many foreign passport holders were threatened with expulsion. While he admits that he has “no idea” when the restrictions were tightened, he told us that the campaign has been quiet for the past years, until the beginning of last year (2017) when “a large number of cases came forward about these shorter visas”.

From our interviews with women affected, many (such as Anna and Olivia above) had found few problems until 2017, while for others, such as Nicole, the recent restrictions compounded a longer legal process over the last two years:

I didn't get a response and usually it takes two weeks and then after two months or something I got a response that said “your visa was denied, you get a one-week visa” and they attached a paper saying to leave ... so I contacted a lawyer and opted for an appeal and that's been going for 2 years now, over two years.

There was no explanation given to Anna, Olivia or Nicole – nor was there to any of the other women interviewed. Instead, a common experience for all was a familiar practice of a both convoluted and opaque processes and regulations set in place by COGAT. Nicole went on to further explain her experience of these bureaucratic processes:

... so the court sets a date, then the Israeli side asks for an extension of the deadline because they're not ready and then it just keeps going. There was a deadline on XX October [2017] but then they postponed, so now I don't even know when the new deadline is ... I just got this one-week visa, but after it had travelled from Beit El⁴ to Bethlehem [then] to my house there were three days left on the visa, two of which were Friday and Saturday where Israeli offices are closed. It was incredibly stressful.

Other interviews were marked by similarly Kafkaian bureaucratic processes: Susanna, a European citizen, recounted: “when you sign something with the Israelis, you have absolutely no idea what are the consequences of that signed document ... I'm afraid if I don't sign they're going to tell me to go home, that I can't be here without visa”; while Silvia commented sardonically “they make

³ <http://www.righttoenter.ps/>

⁴ COGAT's headquarters are situated in Beit El, a settlement close to the city of Ramallah.

up weird rules that they pull out of their ass! It's a stupid and frustrating game". Perhaps most starkly, in an interview with Yotam, a Jerusalem-based lawyer who represents a number of the women (some also included in this research), perceives this opaqueness even from his position as a Hebrew-speaking practitioner in law who specialises in familial rights in West Bank: "that's the idea, it's always difficult to get information, they don't want you to know what the next move is, it's always the same".

The accounts so far evidence how the spouses are subject to an opaque form of bureaucratic precarisation, where rights and routes to appeal are unavailable and/or opaque to visa applicants. This is a familiar instrumentalisation of the permit regime, which logic Yael Berda aptly describes as 'effective inefficiency' (2017, 35). On the one hand, such bureaucratic processes mobilise the 'power of waiting' (Joronen 2017, 995), or the dominating ability to 'steal time' (Peteet 2017), while on the other they obscure themselves out of view in a 'tortuous obstacle race' where 'nothing is transparent' (Machsomwatch 2004). As the human rights group Machsomwatch further notes: 'not only is the arbitrariness deliberate, the inefficiency of the system is built in too' (Machsomwatch 2004, 5; see also Berda 2017; Tawil-Souri 2011, 11-12). Such opaque and purposefully inefficient, often slow-motion governing can distribute precarities in manifold ways: prolonged procedures ensure precarious conditions among the governed prevail (Auyero 2012); or they constitute shallow ways of recognition without ever removing existing precarities (Joronen 2017). They can also embroil subjects in limbos of precarising managerialism, where everything is under constant change and confusing reforms (Povinelli 2011) and they can create complex combinations of zones under different permit regimes (Berda 2017). In all cases it is the procedures themselves that impose, constitute, maintain, install and promote precarious conditions among governed populations.

In the cases of the women we interviewed, the corollary of such practices of opaque and slow-motion governing is that they are placed in situations of quite extreme precarity, often waiting for court dates and renewals with no or little recourse to legal or consular advice.

Specifically, although the slow-motion processes may allow non-Palestinian spouses to stay, the fact of being in the middle of ongoing processes induces a particularly stressful form of precarity.

Nicole explicates her experience of this:

The only reason I can stay is that my case is in court because I don't have a visa. I have a paper that's in Hebrew because it's issued by the court, so I don't pass through checkpoints, because I don't have a visa, but I have the paper from the court but they don't accept it but they should as my lawyer said, but if they don't like it, you spend the rest of the day in a police station so I don't use that particular checkpoint... if they don't like it, they can detain me, they can do whatever. I can't leave. I haven't seen my family in [Europe] in over two years because I can't leave, or I can leave but then I can't come back ... I have an official agreement but are the Israelis good at sticking to official agreements? No. It's so stressful.

There are two immediate observations here. First, Nicole's documentation presents quite a number of frankly confusing conditions where she may or may not be allowed to pass through a particular checkpoint depending on whether they (the IDF soldiers) "like it" or not, and the repercussions of such arbitrary validation are great: Nicole could be detained and/or refused re-entry. Second, Nicole emphasises the frustrating nature of the processes where the **stealing** of time, opaqueness and arbitrariness exposes her to the affectual harm of stress, fear and anxiety. This was a recurrent theme across the interviews, with Laura providing a particularly vivid account:

It's all changed in the past 6-7 months ... if I'd been asked 3 years ago it would've been different ... they're making it impossible to live here ... [we're] trying to piece together what the regulations are via word-of-mouth, we don't have any official information on what the regulations are. Nothing is ever written down, so it's difficult to challenge anything - are these rulings coming from a particular army major, or are they codified in law? We have no idea what they are.

The opaqueness has brought, Laura continues, "a very new feeling" of being

always left on tenterhooks ... this constant fear of “am I doing something wrong?” “are they going to separate me from my kids?” It’s just, it creates a culture of anxiety and fear ... Paranoia because you don’t know what they’re doing with your information.

The bureaucratic tenterhooks, evidently, induce “anxiety and fear” at being made visible not simply as precarious - for precariousness is common to all subjects (Butler 2009, 14-25) - but as exposed to violence in the form of loss of home, (enforced) estrangement from partners and children, and the hampering of movement to, from and within the West Bank. In short: without the requisite visa, these women are subsumed under precarities of being at constant and anxious risk of losing contact with and access to their home, partners and children. We now turn attention to the effects of such precarity on women’s roles in family and political life.

3. Visa precarity and women’s roles in family and political life

We were privileged to hear in-depth, and at times upsetting, stories from the women interviewed. For all of them, the restrictions around movement and employment have brought about conditions in which the home has taken on a different meaning. In Laura’s case, to meet the conditions of her visa means “staying at home, being the main parent, whether that’s what we want or not, we don’t have a choice”, while for Katie: “I either work ‘unofficially’ and worry all the time [about breaking visa restrictions], or I stay at home and end up doing the housework”. Without ability work, home thus becomes a more prominent locus of the women’s lives and, tellingly, not a place of retreat or relax but one that is more closely associated with domestic and maternal labour. This is felt not only by women such as Laura and Katie, who are married to West Bank Palestinians (who thus cannot travel to Jerusalem), but also by their friend, Hanneke,

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3 who is married to a Palestinian with Jerusalem residency (and therefore faces a different set of
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5 conditions⁵), and thus feels isolated because of their respective restrictions on movement:
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7 I wish we could live in Beit Sahour [Bethlehem], close to our work and close to our friends. My
8 friends cannot cross the checkpoint so in the evening after I put the kids to sleep, I do not have
9 anybody who can come visit me and I stay home alone most of the time cause [my husband]
10 works until very late.
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13
14 Hanneke cannot move her family to Bethlehem district because then they would be risk losing
15 Jerusalem residency and the relative freedom of movement that affords (for instance, they can
16 use the airport in Tel Aviv). Nonetheless, she is restricted from being closer to her friends, as
17 they are restricted from visiting her. The result, predictably and understandably, is that there is no
18 other way but for her to take on the domestic labour and remain at home alone while her
19 husband works late. The visa restrictions in these cases thus tie women to motherhood in a
20 specific way by necessitating that they take on the role of primary care giver and they order
21 gender relations in households along the lines of mobility, financial (in)dependency, work permits
22 and parental responsibility.
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33 One case in particular stands out on this theme. Susanna spoke at length, focusing
34 specifically on the tensions that arose in her family household when her baby was born: “it’s
35 totally one thing when you’re just a couple, you can handle, you know, sirens and soldiers and
36 whatever, but once when you got a child it changes everything so you just want to protect your
37 child as a mother as much as you can”. Susanna thus centres the “sirens and soldiers” of the
38 occupation as the main source of concern in her early, pre-married, pre-motherhood life in the
39 West Bank, but this changed on the birth of her child:
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51 ⁵ Conditions for Hanneke are ostensibly less strict with one very notable exception: she is free to travel through
52 Israel, Jerusalem and the West Bank - and use the airport in Tel Aviv – but she and her family are subject to the
53 notorious “Center of Life” residency law for Palestinian Jerusalemites that, in effect, prevents overnight stays or
54 (even temporary) relocation outside of the Jerusalem metropolitan area (see Jefferis 2012). A further development in
55 recent months has put people like Hanneke and her family at further risk: the Israeli Knesset passed a law that
56 allows the Ministry of the Interior to revoke the residency of Palestinians in Jerusalem for the simultaneously
57 opaque and authoritarian crime of “breach of loyalty” to Israel (Al Jazeera 2018).
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59
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We got married and immediately had a child and for the visa shouldn't work and so I found myself very frustrated and screaming at my husband like "you see, you brought me here and I'm just like a housewife, and now I'm just. . . !" but then you realise it's not him, it's me, it's my decision and that I have to deal with that and deal with the occupation

Of particular note here is that the occupation is no longer most prominent in the form of "sirens and soldiers" but in the more bureaucratic form of her visa and the condition that she "shouldn't work". As a consequence - though in the end Susanna is careful to direct her anger and criticism at the Israeli occupation and the restrictions it has placed on her - it is clear that, to borrow Susanna's phrase, in "deal[ing] with the occupation" she has to deal also with the tensions it has brought to her marriage and home life. This is centred, she continues, on her anxieties around becoming "just" a housewife, a role that has brought genuine conflict to her sense of self:

I am frustrated, I don't have a job, I don't have my own source of income ... if I can't find a job, I can't stay here, I can't... even if I start to love this place more and people generally but it's hard, I need my freedom, meaning I want to work I want to be a mother but I'm not only mum and a housewife, I need a job ...

Susanna thus broaches explicitly the gendered implications of the restrictions, stating clearly that her identity has been reduced – or limited - to motherhood and housewife. To put it in few words: to adhere to her visa conditions, Susanna must take on the role of a subordinated and financially dependent woman.

Part of such a role, as Susanna makes painfully clear above, is not only the structural positioning of women as homemaker and housewife, but also the frustration that "I'm not *only* a mum and a housewife". In fact, this restricted role was not only frustrating for Susanna, but the source of quite profound psychological consequences:

having a job is crucially important, it's not only that you're financially independent but also it makes it easier to survive the occupation, otherwise you're just going to sit in the house and to think of every day bad things that are happening around you ... psychologically, that's the thing that scares me the most more than any physical obstacle they put on us. Those things you can somehow manage, understand, comprehend - but psychological pressure that they are putting on people here... it's just terrible, it's disgusting, it's disgusting!

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3 Susanna's frustration and psychological torment were felt also in the similar case of Sandra,
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5 European citizen whose visa problems stretch back three years when COGAT refused to register
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7 the birth of her son. Sandra talked at length of how this impacted the relationship with her
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9 children and her "competency as a mother"

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11 I received an injunction to leave Israeli soil immediately. The problem was, my son – about
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13 three months old at the time – did not have any legal status that would have allowed him to get
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15 any kind of travel document. [This] has had a huge impact on my ability to be the mother I
16
17 wanted to be for my kids, in particular my first-born

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19 Sandra then described in detail how her son's undocumented status meant he spent the first years
20
21 of his life "with a mother who, at times during those two years, was barely hanging onto her
22
23 sanity. The stress and the anxiety this whole situation caused me, he bore the brunt of it".
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25 Sandra's account, as can be detected, was open and heartfelt, we quote the following in full (with
26
27 permission) to illustrate her situation and the quite profound effects it has had on her and her
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29 family:

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31 It clearly impacted negatively my ability to be the mother I wanted to be. My son soaked it all up
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33 like a sponge. At times I just didn't have the patience. Or I just didn't have the mental energy.
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35 Which was in turn a great source of guilt and more anxiety, it's a never-ending circle. I have
36
37 learned to manage better, especially now that I have two kids. But the stress is still there and still
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39 having a huge impact. My oldest kid and I developed a very close – but not necessarily healthy –
40
41 bond from being forced to come and go alone... For his first two years of life, I was his only
42
43 certainty. He was separated from his Dad several times, including for longer stretches of time,
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45 without really knowing why. Up until recently, the simple fact of someone – even someone he
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47 had just met a few hours ago – leaving our home without saying goodbye to him specifically
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49 would send him into a fit of anguished tears that were definitely more than a simple toddler
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51 tantrum...

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53 This is an upsetting account of how politically induced administrative precarities induce stress
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55 and how this contributes to the (re)production of gender roles. In these two cases specifically,
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57 the psychological effects of the women's visa statuses produces them as (or reduces them to) an
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59 emotionally fragile subject. This fragility, in turn, is inextricable from the way they have been
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positioned structurally as non-working, financially dependent subjects of the occupation, a subject position that is dependent on being a woman. The category of woman is thus gendered not by an intrinsically “feminine” heightened sensitivity to “psychological pressure”, but by the impositions of her visa conditions. It is the conditions, then, that call forth ‘a particular dichotomy of gender’ where dualisms reproduce stereotypes: ‘reason, order, culture and action are associated with maleness and are privileged over emotion, uncertainty, nature and passivity’ (Peterson and Sisson Runyan 1999, 40). That the women – in particular Susanna and Sandra – are “pressured” (to use a recurring word from the interviews) into emotion, uncertainty and passivity, evidences not only the ways that ‘gender dichotomies (the *power of gender*) create social effects (the *position of women*)’ (Peterson and Sisson Runyan 1999, 40) but, we would argue, vice versa: the social positioning of women buttresses the already-pervasive and harmful stereotypes that define and perform women’s subordinated positions as emotional and psychologically affected subjects.

Contributing further to this is the way that the women’s roles are shaped in political life. Many of the women arrived in **the West Bank** with well-informed political views. Two of them intended to stay short-term for a period of volunteering with the International Solidarity Movement, a Palestinian-led organisation ‘committed to resisting the Israeli occupation of Palestine using nonviolent, direct-action’.⁶ Two others came to the West Bank to work with NGOs that work with refugees, one with a Christian organisation, while the rest arrived to work as journalists or educators. For instance, Nicole recounted: “I came here volunteering and I was doing activism work but I had to stop because it endangers my visa ... you know that you can’t do certain things that will endanger your visa and ... now I have stopped posting online”. Previously, Nicole’s work involved acting as a witness at sites of potential violence, such as checkpoints and refugee camps, documenting and disseminating information on military and settler violence. Now that she is threatened with expulsion: “I don’t post anything even on social

⁶ <https://palsolidarity.org/about/>

media, or privately”. Silvia shared a similar story where “before I would go to demonstrations every week, both non-violent and, erm, *non-non-violent* – or ones that were disruptive – and would write my opinions [online]”, after her visa became dependent on her marriage she “stopped, did absolutely nothing”.

For Susanna, her experience of this was quite unnerving. Unlike Nicole and Silvia, Susanna **came to the West Bank to study theology and did not consider herself an activist**: “I never go to demonstrations ... I just share from time to time things on Facebook and I started a blog, obviously they are afraid of everything”. Susanna’s activity on social media meant, she continues:

It was written that I should be invited for an interview and I was *really* upset... I came home and I sat down and I was like “I’m going to write about what happened”. I was writing a story for my blog and that friend of mine sent me a message and she was like “hey, just to let you know, you’re an activist, there is a red flag” and I thought “*what the hell!?*”. So I decided ok ... I will not post anything, I will not share news or anything”

The prospect of interrogation, for Susanna meant she would not share details of her life in Palestine. Quite poignantly, she closed the interview by reflecting on her silence in terms of sense of self and her role as a mother:

I hate, I hate that they silence me. Now I’m in a position that I can’t say [anything] because my visa depends on this. And now I have a child and they will kick me out if I become more active and it’s hard not to share the truth it’s hard to just shut your mouth and they are doing that really well?!

Adding a further dimension to the discussion of gender, here Susanna reveals something of the ways that the visa bureaucracy makes political voice irreconcilable with motherhood; the very conditions that necessitate a visa are those that simultaneously silence the political voices of women. Susanna cannot speak because her family can only remain together in **the West Bank** on the condition that she remains silent. Brought together, the cases of Nicole, Silvia and Susanna reveal something of how visa precarity has contributed the reproduction of the subject position

of ‘passive-silent woman’ that delineates women’s role in – and exclusion from – political life. Further silence, it is important to note, comes from a further four women who politely declined to be interviewed for this research, citing the fact that they did not want to jeopardise their visa applications.

As we mention above, we do not seek to deflect attention away from Palestinian forms of patriarchy, but we do wish to explore how such patriarchy is reproduced by the occupying administration. On this point, Laura makes an important intervention: “they’re trying to take all of our rights and mobility away so that we are basically housebound. They don’t want us to work, they don’t want us to be able to drive, they don’t want us to have much freedom of movement”. Laura’s repetition of “they” is pointed and directed, not at Palestinian patriarchal structures, nor at the Palestinian Authority, but at the Israeli Civil Administration whom she accuses of hypocrisy:

It’s always about how Israeli society is “progressive” ... to me it’s ironic because the Israelis, especially when they’re whitewashing their occupation, mention how Israeli society is so much better for women than Palestinian society. Israel likes to position itself as so big on women’s rights and equality - that’s basically what they’re taking away from us is any such rights, having access to an income and the ability to travel around.

Laura thus makes the point herself of how the Israeli state plays a large part in the (re)production of patriarchy in Palestine. It can be argued from this perspective that the visa restrictions provide a structural complement to the discursive construction within Israeli political discourse that contrasts a progressive and modern democracy with a primitive, backwards and intolerant Palestinian ‘other’ (Puar 2011; Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2015). Part of this rests on the portrayal of women as the passive victims of “primitive” and “brutish” (Löwstedt 2015, 210) or “irrational and unpredictably violent” Palestinian masculinity’ (Ryan 2017, 428).⁷ As the accounts here show, it is not the women whom are tied to their homes because of the ‘marginalising’ function

⁷ As is detectable, for instance, in the recent words of opposition leader Yair Lapid, who characterised Palestinians as ‘people who hang gay people from telephone poles ... who think it’s ok to beat your wife ... who think it’s ok to burn churches, to kill Jews and Christians just because they’re Jews and Christians’ (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hyb_28GTAblk).

of Palestinian patriarchy (see Roer-Strier and Ben Ezra 2006, 41) but, in fact, it is the Israeli administration imposes patriarchal forms by shaping women's roles in family and political life.

The visa conditions thus tie precarity to gender in manifold ways and the accounts here evoke broader histories of the domestic and economic positions of women. For second-wave feminists, mothering was identified and examined as a key element in the 'sexual asymmetries in the social organisation of gender' in which the role of primary care giver ensures that women's 'primary location' is in 'the domestic sphere' (Chodorow 1978, 9-10). In this formulation, asymmetry emerges from the differentiating and hierarchical ordering of spheres: 'culturally and politically, the public sphere dominates the domestic, and hence men dominate women' (Chodorow 1978, 9-10). If there was a general and measurable (but tentative) gain for women's rights in the latter half of the twentieth century, it was the wider presence of women in the economic and political spheres. And though, quite obviously, this gain is not geographically undifferentiated, it is true that the continued existence and resistance of Palestine is in large part owed to the prominent roles women have taken in political and social life from the early formation of nationhood after the Balfour Declaration (Fleischmann 2003) and the Naqba (Peteet 1991), to the First Intifada (Jean-Klein 2003), Oslo negotiations (Sharoni 1995) and resistance to the contemporary period of increased militarisation (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2009). This is not to dismiss the presence and violence of Palestinian patriarchy, but rather to highlight that Palestinian women's voices are strong and their struggles are historically tied to not only its "own" immediate patriarchy but also to that of the occupier: Israel has a long history of exploiting, violating and exacerbating already uneven gender relations within the Occupied Territories (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2009, 13-16). The visa conditions must be considered in this context, that Israel's spousal visa regulations contribute to the (re)production of uneven gender relations in the West Bank.

4. Visa precarity and demography

In this section we consider the gendered effects of visa precarity in the wider context of Israel's 'demographic war' on the population of the West Bank (Faitelson 2009). This 'war'⁸ has taken on various fronts from the violent 'ethnic cleansing' of the Nakba and after (see Pappé 2006) to the more subtle juridical impositions to do with the Civil Administration and permits (Gordon 2008, 187-8), legal rights and citizenship (Yiftachel 2006) and demolition and 'zoning' in the expansion of Jerusalem (Chiodelli, 2012). 'Demographic competition' (Löwstedt 2015, 202-3) has thus developed in which women's bodies are put in the service of nationhood to (re)produce a Jewish or, alternatively, Palestinian majority (see Pell 2017, 137-9). In the context of this research, all of the women claimed that their current visa struggles are clearly linked with Israel's direct efforts and indirect desires to have them, and their families, leave the West Bank. Susanna, for instance, expressed her view of the Israeli administration as "excellent at making many internationals consider leaving", while Nicole explicated the link between stress and leaving: "the whole idea of the visa process is very clearly [to] make people leave, let the internationals take their kids and leave Palestine... I guess they're succeeding, because it's so stressful". These opinions are not based on only speculation, both Susanna and Nicole were able to cite specific examples of women in their position who had either left or made plans to leave. Another European citizen, Sandra, was also able to provide quite strong evidence of a growing pressure on non-Palestinian women to take their families away from the West Bank. To register their marriage, she and her husband were given an appointment with the Head of Registry and Passports Department, Diana Ben-Haim, at the Civil Administration in the West Bank settlement of Beit El.⁹ As is apparently common, the couple were separated for interview (and interrogation) and Sandra's husband, Abed, was faced with the following provocation-suggestion: "so, now that you married

⁸ For example, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert warned in October 2007 that Israel faces 'a demographic battle, drowned in blood and tears' (Faitelson 2009, 51)

⁹ Diana Ben-Haim was talked about with some regularity by the women we interviewed and has been referred to in journalistic accounts of the visa regulations as "the poster child of the Civil Administration as it relates to foreign visas ... People have begun to ask themselves whether a Diana policy or Israeli policy is being applied. But as far as we're concerned, she's an employee of the Civil Administration. It's the state of Israel's policies that we are worried about." (Right to Enter, cited in Mondoweiss 2017; see also Hass 2017).

a [European] woman, you will take [European] citizenship and leave, right? Why would you stay here? There's nothing for you here, your life would be so much better in [Europe], don't you think?"

The effects of such explicit threat have been quite profound and have added to the anxiety that Sandra has felt during her prolonged (and recently intensified) struggle with visas. She reports that now:

We are considering our situation, moving to [Europe] ... I am not sure how much longer I can stay illegally without this having a serious impact on my family ... Yet, if we leave while my kids and I are illegal, my kids will be able to come back for visits, as tourists, with their Dad, but I will most likely be banned to return for life. And any hopes of my kids ever receiving a Jerusalem ID number would probably be gone.

In this unjust scenario where Palestine-born Palestinians are denied the right to return,¹⁰ there is an obvious demographic victory for the Israeli state: one Palestinian (Abed) will be absent, Sandra will leave and thus lose her slim chance of gaining Palestinian ID, and their two children will never be granted the right to live in Jerusalem, the site of Israel's most aggressive demographic strategies (see Chiodelli 2012; Wari 2011). The prospect, then, is of four fewer Palestinian people in the West Bank or East Jerusalem. We can add to these Laura – whose account of “anxiety and fear” we reference above – and her family who have taken the chance to move abroad because “my visa period is getting shorter and shorter and I don't know when they will just say ‘no’”. Ahmad, Laura's husband, explained that the decision has been a difficult one but “since they reduced the visa time, we can't take the risk. We have two kids ... one day we will come back”. Silvia, who was interviewed from North America via Skype can also be added; she and her husband and child left the West Bank in the middle of 2017.

In most of our cases there were also signs of a further issue relating to demography. This was to do with family planning and the ways that visa related precarities affect reproductive

¹⁰ In stark contrast to those Israeli citizens who freely “return” to (an illegally occupied) somewhere they have never been.

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2
3 decisions. While the ‘demographic competition’ has undoubtedly played part in Palestinian
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5 women desiring large families, either to ‘outbreed’ Jewish Israelis (Kanaaneh 2002, 61), or to
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7 mitigate against the loss of children (boys especially) through the violence of the occupation
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9 (Fargues 2000, 440-2), recent studies have indicated signs of change that women in the West
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11 Bank are beginning to exercise a ‘conscious limiting of families as a response to the ongoing
12
13 conflict and violence’ (Pell 2017, 144). This was a clear factor for one of the women we spoke to
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15 in this research, Nicole, who cited the occupation and her current visa dispute as the reason for
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17 ruling out the prospect of having children:
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20 no way, not now... if I had children I couldn’t live here, you can’t be sure you can access medical
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22 services, there are no Palestinian ambulances allowed on our street because no Palestinian cars are
23
24 allowed to drive [here] ... then these women that are forced to give birth at the checkpoint... it’s
25
26 just humiliation

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28 Nicole’s reference here is to the shocking but well documented cases of Palestinian women who,
29
30 because of restrictions to movement, are forced to give birth at checkpoints (Ghanim 2008;
31
32 Shoaibi 2011). She adds: “and of course without papers, it would be impossible for me to get
33
34 quickly to a hospital”. Nicole is only one example but we include her account as an indication of
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36 how precarities induced by visa regulations and the limits on her mobility have affected
37
38 reproductive rights and decisions.

39
40 In a related account, Hamsa, the husband of Katie, a North American citizen, told of his
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42 meeting at Beit El to gain a marriage permit, in which he was threatened by the interrogating IDF
43
44 commander: “if you marry her, we will treat her worse than a Palestinian!”. At this, Hamsa was
45
46 understandably incensed, but his response was measured: “if you don’t let me marry her I’ll marry
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48 four Palestinian women and have 40 Palestinian children, do you want that?”. This, according to
49
50 Hamsa, was key to obtaining Katie’s first visa and it is telling that his retort plays on Israel’s
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52 anxieties around demography and fertility. Yotam, the lawyer mentioned above, provided a
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54 succinct summary of these anxieties:
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Israel unfortunately is obsessed with the issue of demography not only within the 48 borders but also in Palestine and so now they are finding all kinds of ways – excuses – to make these permits that these women hold to make them shorter and shorter ... it's part of the Israeli control of the Palestinian Population Registry.

Yotam thus makes clear the demographic objective and links it directly to the visas of the women, adding: “basically Israel doesn’t want them here, ok, it doesn’t want the foreign spouse and it doesn’t want the family itself. It’s a way of telling these people ‘you are not [wanted], go and live somewhere else, not in the West Bank”.

5. Conclusions

The objective in this article was to show how politically induced precarities in the cases of non-Palestinian women married to Palestinians function to specific ends of the occupation of Palestine. As we show in the first section, the precarious conditions of the women are effected by a complex of actors connected to the Israeli state and enforced through its institutions (COGAT, chiefly) and ‘petty sovereigns’ (Butler 2006; Joronen 2016), such as soldiers at checkpoints and interrogators at Beit El, who are ‘authorised’ to make arbitrary decisions precisely because of the obscure and opaque visa conditions. Carrying the authority of the Israeli judiciary in the form of documentation is, for example, no guarantee: one is subject to an indecipherable process at checkpoints and airports, or at the next court hearing (if it takes place). The women – and even a law practitioner – have difficulty gaining clarity on the exact nature of their bureaucratic standing. As we have seen, court dates are postponed; visas are issued with durations of as short as three days; and mobilities are severely curtailed. All the time, the risk of detention and separation looms, such that these structural impositions bring with them, in the words of the women interviewed, a significant amount of “stress”, “anxiety” and “fear” –even “paranoia”. As we have further shown, this condition of precarity has broader connotations for family and political life as the women cannot but be primary care givers to their children and financially dependent on their husbands. Additionally, their voices are silenced and they are thus

effectively excluded from political life. Israel’s spousal visa regulations thereby contribute to the (re)production of uneven gender relations in the West Bank.

For Israel, visa precarity thus works towards two of the main ends of its occupation. First, as we argue above, the structural subordination of women in Palestinian society serves as a complement to the discursive production of Palestinian men as ‘irrational and unpredictably violent’ (Ryan 2017, 428), which contrasts with Israel’s idea and promotion of itself as a progressive and liberal democracy (see Pappé 2014, 305-313). Second, as we have further argued, the visa precarity constitutes one more front in Israel’s demographic war on the population of the Occupied Territories. Returning to Palestine will be a difficult task for many of the women, and retaining residency rights will be similarly difficult, if not impossible (especially for Jerusalem ID holders). Add to this, too, the case of one woman (Nicole) deciding against having children while her visa situation remains precarious, and there builds a convincing case for implicating Israel’s spousal visa regulations in the demographic objective of emptying out the West Bank. The research thus contributes to understandings of the gendered effects of the occupation of Palestine and the ways that the Israeli state induces precarity through its administration of the West Bank. Future inquiry might seek to deepen these understandings by focusing on emergent themes in this research. For instance, the absencing of women’s voices from political discourse is a troubling effect of the cases here, a more concentrated study could seek to uncover and examine the bureaucratic process that can result in being, as Susanna put it, “red-flagged” as an activist to be interrogated. Researchers might also bring into focus the gendered effects for the women’s partners and examine their consequent roles as (secondary) care givers and main wage earner, while also focusing on the ways - and extents to which - they share, allay and/or amplify anxieties around spousal visa precarity. Finally and importantly, the issue of women’s reproductive choices in the context of bureaucratic precarity – and broader geopolitics - is a somewhat urgent issue also beyond Palestine given the growing numbers of dispossessed,

displaced and undocumented women across the globe (see Mountz 2017; Pain and Staeheli 2014).

We might finally recall that precarious conditions do not only induce subjugation, passivity, and negative embodiments such as anxiety; precariousness can also engender and affirm new agential capacities and forms of solidarity (see Butler 2016; Hammami 2016; Joronen 2017). Taking this seriously, an additional approach would focus on the potentials of shared precarity to mobilise and act. As one of our interviewees explained above, she and others in her position have come together “trying to piece together what the regulations are via word-of-mouth” (Laura). Ultimately, therefore, a research agenda might involve documenting and even facilitating nascent strategies of resistance to the opaque and convoluted administrative processes that induce visa precarity with such deleterious gendered and demographic effects.

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